

# Rebellion, Loneliness, and Night-Sea Journey: John Barth's Postmodern Mythos

Sung-Kon Kim

Dept. of English, Seoul Nat'l University

The man who finds his homeland sweet  
is still a tender beginner; he to whom  
every soil is as his native one is already  
strong; but he is perfect to whom the  
entire world is as a foreign land.

Hugo of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*

Knowledge is a referring back: in its  
essence a *regressus infinitum*.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*

## I

When Nietzsche announced the death of God at the end of the nineteenth century, he implied two contradictory feelings. One was the sense of denial and the other the sense of loss. In other words, Nietzsche proclaimed the denial of God, in the sense that man should now denounce the hierarchy of the dominant culture which had hitherto deceived, oppressed, and abused human beings in the name of the Absolute, Truth, or God. At the same time, Nietzsche suggested the loss of God, in the sense that man had now lost his origin, center, or foundation by denouncing God.<sup>1)</sup> The sense of loss as well as the sense

1) See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1969), p. 125.

"The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried. "I shall tell you. *We have killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers... God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him."

See also Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 96-120. Especially see Chapter 3, "The Death of God and the Revelation." Kaufmann sees in Nietzsche's pronouncement that God is dead both the sense of loss and the sense of denial:

"Nietzsche prophetically envisages himself as a madman: to have lost means madness; and when mankind will discover it has lost God, universal madness will break out. This apoca-

of denial eventually generated man's quest for new order and new value to replace the old.

Ever since Nietzsche pronounced the death of God, therefore, the sense of loss or the sense of denial—of value, meaning, or language in human life—has become one of the dominant themes in modern literature. Accordingly, the quest for new order has also been an obsessive concern for contemporary writers who often return to the past in search of the well of wisdom, imagination, and inspiration. John Barth is a good example of this.

Throughout his entire career as a writer, John Barth has lucidly and persistently manifested his deep concern with the problems of exhausted possibilities of literary modes, and the discovery of a new possibility to replenish the moribund artistic conventions. Although his preoccupation with the "death of the novel" culminates in the late sixties, during which time he published the controversial yet monumental essay "The Literature of Exhaustion" and the much celebrated book *Lost in the Funhouse*, Barth's interest in the used-upness of literature and the powerlessness of language, in fact, can be traced in all of his novels. The problem of exhaustion (the sense of denial) and the problem of replenishment (the sense of loss and quest) of literature has been indeed Barth's life-long obsession and the task with which he has been constantly tackling, just as Menelaus on the beach at Pharos desperately wrestles with the amorphous Old Man of the Sea, Proteus, to find out the right direction in the labyrinth of the world in which he is lost.

Barth's awareness of the used-upness of literary modes and forms stems from his fundamental distrust of conventional language for its inadequacy to properly convey contemporary reality. This suspicion of Barth about the validity of language also strongly echoes the Nietzschean skepticism about language that is immediately extended to his defiant denouncement of the dominant culture. By suspecting the credibility of conventional language, Nietzsche ultimately defies the credibility of conventional values, morals, and norms. Nietzsche inquires:

And moreover, what about these conventions of language? Are they really the products of knowledge of the sense of truth? Do the designations and the things coincide? Is language the adequate expressions of all realities?<sup>2)</sup>

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lyptic sense of dreadful things to come hang over Nietzsche's thinking like a thundercloud." (p. 97)

"Nietzsche was more deeply impressed than almost any other men before him by the manner in which belief in God and a divine teleology may diminish the value and significance of man: how this world and life may be completely devaluated *ad maiorem dei gloriam*." (p. 101)

2) Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," *The Portable Nietzsche*,

Nietzsche, therefore, prophesies the existence of perpetual "difference" between the designations and the things or between what the Structuralists call the signified and the signifier. Barth, too, seriously doubts not only the adequacy of language but also the legitimacy of the dominant culture and tradition. It is highly illuminating to notice at this point that it was in the late sixties that John Barth most painfully realized the powerlessness of language and literature. The sixties was a time when American intellectuals challenged the hierarchy of the traditional and conventional values, and university campuses were disrupted by the clashes between the conservative power and radical students. Barth explains the circumstances under which he was forced to write the essay, "The Literature of Exhaustion.":

A dozen years ago I published in these pages a much-misread essay called "The Literature of Exhaustion," ... in that somewhat apocalyptic place and time, for the ongoing health of narrative fiction. (The time was the latter 1960s; the place Buffalo, New York, on a university campus embattled by tear-gassing riot-police and tear-gassed Vietnam war protesters, while from across the Peace Bridge in Canada came Marshall McLuhan's siren song that we "print-oriented bastards" were obsolete.) The simple burden of my essay was that the forms and modes of art live in human history and are therefore subject to used-upness, at least in the minds of significant numbers of artists in particular times and places; in other words, that *artistic conventions are liable to be retired, subverted, transcended, transformed*, or even deployed against themselves to generate new and lively work.<sup>3)</sup> (Italics mine)

As observed from the above passage, there are striking similarities between Barth and Nietzsche in their basic stance against the tradition. The above italicized word, "transcended," also echoes Pynchon's notion of "transcending the gravity of the dead center."

In this paper, therefore, I will argue that, as an outsider, John Barth is ultimately in the lineage of Vico, Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida with his denouncement of the Absolute or the dominant culture, with his quest for new language and imagination to replace the old, and with his interest in madness, unreason, and irrationality. I will go so far as to say that in our present circumstances both literature and criticism are not only an adversary activity but also a way of discovery, a cognitive beginning, and a symbolic journey constantly searching for new modes of language and imagination. Also, I will discuss Barth's fiction in the light of contemporary Western literary theory, examining how the latter is indispensable to understanding and interpreting the former, and how

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trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1978), p. 45.

3) John Barth, "The Literature of Replenishment," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 379 (January 1980), 71.

creative writing and critical discourse ultimately unite with each other in their quest for what I call historical and mythical imagination.

It is my contention that, like other postmodern writers, John Barth, journeys back to the past, denouncing the Absolute that governs the present and searching for new order, new value, and new imagination. It is also my contention that Barth's ultimate concern is, therefore, how to find the new imagination—a clue to get out of the funhouse created by the writer himself by denouncing the absolute value and system. This new "imagination" that Barth hopes to discover in the past is, in fact, the "key to the treasure" that will help bewildered contemporary writers escape from the labyrinth in which all the possibilities of choice and direction are seemingly exhausted. This "heroic enterprise"<sup>4)</sup> of contemporary writers to escape from the labyrinth, or to hold fast Proteus until he exhausts reality's frightening disguises and returns to his true self and then shows them direction is the "beginning" for Barth, from which his journey always takes place and to which his journey is always destined.

## II

Barth's "beginning," of course, starts with his skepticism and denouncement of the legitimacy of the absolute value, truth, or what I have been calling the dominant culture, which exerts its ruthless power to dominate and manipulate mankind throughout human history. Man has been subdued, chained, and helplessly abused by this formidable absolute power that governs our tradition, conventions, and social institutions.

And yet, what we are forced to believe as the absolute value or the orthodox language is, in fact, hardly more than an illusion or what Freud calls the "dream-contents." An unbridgeable gap is inevitably created, therefore, between the irrecoverable original language and the distorted pseudo language that we now possess. In other words, between the unfallen language that man lost from the beginning and the currently dominant language, there exists an irreducible "difference" and "distance." Accordingly, what we perceive as truth through our current language is by no means truth, but is only an illusion of the truth. Truth is thus doomed to be deferred until the lost original language

4) See John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 220 (August 1967), 34. Barth calls the attempt either to escape the labyrinth or to keep holding Proteus "a heroic enterprise, with salvation as its object." This "heroic enterprise" is what I call "human beginning" in the present text.

is restored.

It is precisely this realization that prompted Vico to reexamine the origin of human history in order to investigate the "wisdom of the ancestors," Nietzsche to denounce the conventional concept of history and morality, and suggest instead genealogy and extra-moral sense, Foucault to excavate the past to exhume the buried truth with his archaeological approach, and Derrida to continue his metaphysical dance of language *ad infinitum* between abysses. It is also this awareness that currently stimulates postmodern American writers to revolt against the mainstream of modern culture and to reexamine the past, searching for an apocalyptic vision for the grim future.

Such is the case with John Barth. In his fictional world, Barth, like Vico, persistently returns to the past to find the "key to the treasure," like Nietzsche, denounces and mocks the orthodox versions of history and myth, like Foucault, conducts an archaeological and genealogical research on the past, and like Derrida, continues his nihilistic yet cheerful dance of language and notions in the ever-promising yet never-fulfilling reality.

Barth's skepticism and distrust of the absolute value, truth, and reason appears as early as in his first novel, *The Floating Opera*.<sup>5)</sup> From the outset of his career, Barth firmly denounces the existence of the absolute value in the world. In Chapter XXV, "The Inquiry," one of the most important chapters in *The Floating Opera*, Todd Andrews writes five notes in his inquiry, the first three of which are especially a good example of this:

- I. Nothing has intrinsic value.
- II. The reasons for which people attribute value to things are always ultimately irrational.
- III. There is, therefore, no ultimate "reason" for valuing anything.<sup>6)</sup>

At first, Todd contemplates suicide, for there is no final reason for living in this world, a world with neither absolute value nor ultimate reason. At the end of the book, however, Todd realizes that if there is no final reason for living, there is no final reason for suicide either. In other words, Todd denounces the ultimate value that constitutes the mainstream of modern society. Then he is plunged into infinite nihilism, for now he has lost his own

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5) Critics tend to regard Barth's first two novels, *The Floating Opera* and *The End of the Road*, as conventionally realistic novels written during Barth's apprenticeship, thereby drastically different from and inferior to his later experimental novels.

This is somewhat misleading, however, because the two early novels contain many significant motifs, metaphors, and themes which constantly recur in his later novels.

6) John Barth, *The Floating Opera* (New York: Bantam, 1980), pp. 213, 218.

root and is simply "floating." Finally, however, Todd overcomes the despair of being thrown in a world where no ultimate answer to his problems is available, and shows his existential determination to live, thereby creating his own version of "beginning."

Of course, this echoes Camus' *le Mythe de Sisyphé* (1942) and also the Sartrean Existentialism. It is true that Barth wrote his two early novels, *The Floating Opera* and *The End of the Road*, under the influence of Existentialism and that Todd Andrews is an Existential hero. Nevertheless, Barth emphasizes in an interview appeared in *Contemporary Literature* (Winter-Spring, 1965) that he thought he was writing "a series of nihilistic amusing novels," (p. 11) not particularly Existential novels, when he was engaged in his first two novels. Further, he denies any direct connections between *The Floating Opera* and *le Mythe de Sisyphé*, saying:

There certainly may be similarities between them, but it didn't color my work because I haven't read *The Myth of Sisyphus*. I believe Camus says the first question that a thoughtful man has to ask himself is why he is going to go on, then make up his mind whether to blow his brains out or not; at the end of *The Floating Opera* my man decides he won't commit suicide because there's no more reason to stop living than to persist in it. It's quite curious how perceptive people—reviewers, critics, knowledgeable students—will point out things to you about your books and the connection between them and other works that you simply didn't have in mind when you wrote your book. (p. 12)

It is not important, therefore, to define whether *The Floating Opera* is an Existential novel or not. The more important issue is that the novel manifests Barth's skepticism and denial of the absolute value, truth, or reason in the world.

Barth's next novel, *The End of the Road*, opens its first page with an interesting statement of the narrator: "IN A SENSE, I AM JACOB HORNER." Jacob Horner, protagonist of *The End of the Road*, lives in a world where everything is uncertain, including his own identity. In this world of uncertainty, everything is deferred, floating, and immobile. This explains why Jacob suddenly experiences physical immobility at Pennsylvania Station on March 17, 1951. As Nietzsche suggests, this uncertainty and immobilization primarily originate from the sense of loss—that is, the loss of God or the loss of the ultimate principle that governs the world. Jacob's immobility, then, is modern man's dilemma in a world where the absolute value is absent, and new value has not been found yet. In this sense, Jacob is a Todd Andrews after *The Floating Opera*, who, after denying the old value and giving up the idea of committing suicide, has not

discovered new value yet.<sup>7)</sup>

Being immobile and “weatherless,” Jacob thus ceases to exist except in a meaningless metabolic sense. The mysterious Negro doctor whom Jacob encounters at Pennsylvania Station prescribes Mythotherapy for Jacob, which is based on two assumptions: “that human existence precedes human essence,”; “and that a man is free not only to choose his own essence but to change it at will.”<sup>8)</sup> These two strong existentialist premises would not only cure Jacob’s immobility, but also enable him to create his own version of value system through choosing and action, or “intention and method”<sup>9)</sup> that ultimately leads into his own “beginning.”

When Jacob chooses to exist and move by teaching prescriptive grammar at the Wicimico State Teachers College in Maryland, he has to confront Joe Morgan who is obviously an emblem of the Absolute, Reason, or Rationality that is immediately unreliable, hypocritical, and tyrannical. Majoring in literature, philosophy, and history, Joe appropriately represents the whole of human sciences or Western metaphysics. Also, he is a professor of history who believes in the “continuity of history (*ER*, p. 20)<sup>10)</sup> and who “heads directly for his destination, implying by his example that paths should be laid where people walk.” (*ER*, P. 20) His wife, Rennie, once describes Joe’s attribute to Jacob:

“He’s God.... He is just God.... He is noble, strong, and brave, more than anybody I’ve ever seen. A disaster for him is a disaster for reason, intelligence, and civilization, because he’s the

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7) Some critics’ interpretation that Todd Andrews becomes Joe Morgan, and Harrison Mack becomes Jacob Horner is obviously a misreading of the texts.

8) John Barth, *The End of the Road* (New York: Bantam, 1969), p. 88.

9) In his book, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, Edward Said argues that beginning means intention and also method. For instance:

“...that a beginning not only creates but is its own method because it has intention.”  
(p. xiii)

10) The idea of the “discontinuity of history” has been one of the most fundamental and important theoretical grounds for Vico, Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida. Especially Foucault keeps emphasizing the total lack of continuity linking details together in history. He argues that history is radically mixed up with discontinuity and chance. See, for instance, Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 139-164.

Foucault’s idea of discontinuity and chance is further illuminated by Derrida’s lecture, “Mes Chances: Psychanalyse et Litterature,” which was held at Columbia University on April 5, 1983. In the lecture, Derrida argued that history consists of a series of chances, explicitly denying the continuity in history. Derrida related Mes Chances to Malchance, Malchance to Superstition, Superstition to Psychanalyse, while playing with his another neologism, Mechance by which he mean Malchance. Analyzing Freud and Poe, Derrida maintained that the infinite possibilities of chances will eventually bring une Chance (meaning good luck) to literature.

quintessence of these things.” (ER, p.123)

And yet, Joe is an imperfect man who never finishes his doctoral dissertation on history, a hypocrite who picks his nose while masturbating when nobody is around, and a myope who constantly jabs his spectacles back on his nose.

At first, Jacob unconsciously imitates Joe, but the Negro doctor advises him to stop imitating Joe and create his own role. (ER, p. 87) Soon Jacob realizes that his fate is not to imitate but to challenge and fight Joe Morgan. Jacob speculates on Joe:

Joe was the Reason or Being (I was using Rennie's Cosmos). I was the Unreason, or Not-Being; and the two of us were fighting without quarter for possession of Rennie, like God and Satan for the soul of man. (ER, p.129)

How appropriately the above quoted passage describes the theme of the novel! Joe represents the tyrannical Reason, Absolute, or God, however perversely inspired, whereas Jacob symbolizes the Unreason, or the Satanic power that challenges the hegemony of the perverse divine power. Rennie, the slave-like wife of Joe Morgan, also appropriately represents “the soul of man” who has long suffered from the oppressive hierarchy of the Absolute or Reason.

Appropriately enough, Joe is challenged and eventually ruined by Jacob, of whom he is always contemptuous; Jacob impregnates Rennie and subsequently lets her die during the illegal abortion performed by the Negro doctor. It may not be going too far to say that Jacob's affair with Rennie, in fact, can be viewed as his symbolic attempt to protect Rennie from the tyranny of Joe as well as his ultimate challenge to the Reason or Absolute that Joe embodies. Figuratively speaking, it might also represent contemporary writers' attempt to save literature of man's soul from the oppressive power of the dominant culture.

Of course, we have to acknowledge that Jacob Horner has a number of weaknesses to be the strong hero of the Nietzschean mode, the subvertive redeemer. There are indeed a crowd of ironies about Jacob in *The End of the Road*, which cannot be overlooked. Jacob, for instance, is weak and confused from the beginning to the end of the novel. Near the end of the novel, he confesses to Joe Morgan over the telephone:

“God, Joe—I don't know where to start or what to do!”

His voice remained clear, bright, and close in my ear. Tears ran in a cold flood down my face and neck, onto my chest, and I shook all over with violent chill. (ER, p.197)



Even in the final scene, it is Jacob, not Joe, who is confused and bewildered. Thus Jacob leaves town, again "without weather." Rennie's, death too, clearly symbolizes Jacob's inability and powerlessness. The reason why Jacob's therapist, not an obstetrician, performs the abortion should be understood in this context. After Rennie dies, the Negro doctor solemnly announces that it is not Jacob's personal tragedy but everyone's: "This thing was everybody's fault, Horner. Let it be everybody's lesson," (*ER*, p. 192) suggesting that Jacob is Everyman.

And yet, there are suggestions that Jacob is not a complete failure throughout the novel. Especially, at the end of the book, there is a strong ambiguity; Jacob climbs into a taxi and utters, "Terminal," a place for both arrival and departure. Besides, Joe Morgan has now disappeared; only his voice is there, lingering on the phone, the "dead instrument in the dark." (*ER*, p. 197)

Jacob's failure in saving Rennie primarily comes from his failure in discovering new imagination that can overpower Joe's value system—the formidable Rationalism. It is by no means a coincidence, therefore, that the image of Laocoön, the wiseman of Troy who was killed with his two sons by the serpent of "Knowledge and Imagination," (*ER*, p. 196) frequently appears in *The End of the Road*. In order to create a new value system to replace the old, Jacob has to find new knowledge and imagination that might also have saved Rennie's life and his baby's as well. Jacob contemplates:

Perhaps I reflected what could eventually destroy both Morgans, after all, was *lack of imagination*. I glanced up at Laocoön; his agony was abstract and unsuggestive. (*ER*, p. 127) (Italics mine)

Obviously, however, Jacob is not able to find the imagination. Thus he leaves the bust of Laocoön behind and continues his journey searching for new imagination.

Barth's denial of the absolute value culminates in *The Sot-Weld Factor*, a *tour de force* that brilliantly delineates an innocent young man's eye-opening process through his journey from England to America in the seventeenth century. At the beginning of the novel, Barth burlesques the two representative Western scholars of the absolute or what Derrida calls "logocentrism": Descartes and Newton.<sup>11)</sup> Descartes' *Discourse on Method* and Newton's *The Theories of Universe Gravitation* are perhaps the two most powerful, dominant theories

11) It is interesting to notice that Descartes, Newton, and Kant are the three representative philosophers who have been mostly criticized by the Post-Structuralist critics and their progenitors for their heavy reliance on Reason, Mind, and Universal Law as well as for their negligence of historicism and humanism.

that governed the Western mind until the appearance of Einstein's "Theory of Relativity." Descartes and Newton, the two celebrated mathematicians, scientists, and philosophers, believed that the universe is governed by the absolute principle and thus no humanistic and historical disciplines are necessary. In *The New Science*, Vico sharply attacks Descartes' concept of the "thinking mind" or "Reason" which declares that man and the universe are controlled by the mind, science, and God.<sup>12)</sup> Barth, too, poignantly criticizes Descartes, saying, "He is a great hand for twisting the cosmos to fit his theory." (*SWF*, p. 25)<sup>13)</sup> Like Vico, Barth fundamentally rejects the Cartesian approach since Cartesianism does not allow any probability or multiple possibilities, maintaining that knowledge is obtainable only through metaphysics and mathematics upon which the science of physics depends. At the same time, Barth also satirizes Newton as a lustful homosexual. Henry Burlingame, the mysterious tutor of Eben and Anna, opens the eyes of Eben to the terrible reality by demystifying the great Newton:

I was out to learn the nature of the universe from Newton .... Newton grew as enamored as of me as had More, with the difference only, that there was naught platonical in his passion. (*SWF*, p. 25)

Like Descartes, Newton, too, belongs to the Cartesian school, valuing only a clear and distinct idea, whose validity is, in fact, very dubious. Newton also believed that universal law governs the universe as well as human history. It is highly appropriate, therefore, that Barth burlesques the two philosophers of Reason before Eben begins his journey of initiation.<sup>14)</sup>

12) Vico's theory of knowledge was developed on the two distinct tendencies. First, his gradual denouncement of Cartesian rationalism and the theory of distinct ideas led by such philosophers as Descartes. Second, proceeding in pace with this, his epistemological doctrines of combining history with philosophy, and philosophy with philology. cf. Giambattista Vico, *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, trans. M. H. Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1944), pp. 128-30, 137-8.

For further detail on Vico's criticism on Descartes' *cogito*, see Leon Pampa, *Vico: A Study of the New Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 75-8, 84-5.

"The demand for certainty which had inspired Descartes in his search for a theory of knowledge had led him and his followers to the conclusion that knowledge was obtainable only with regard to the propositions of metaphysics, mathematics and those aspects of the natural world which could be given a mathematical basis and upon which the science of physics depended. The criterion of 'clear and distinct' ideas offered, however, no guidance in matters of probability which, on the basis, could not be distinguished from the downright false." (p. 76)

13) John Barth, *The Sot-Weed Factor* (New York: Bantam, 1975), p. 25.

14) It is somewhat regrettable that I cannot find any adequate or insightful interpretation of this important chapter on Newton and Descartes (and his disciple Sir Henry More) in any of the essays or books written by Barthian scholars yet. Even Alan Holder, one of the fine Barthian critics, does not go any further on this issue than simply saying:

Also, Barth thoroughly mocks the supposedly authentic versions of history that represent absolute value in *The Sot-Weed Factor*. Burlingame plays a crucial role in the novel in unveiling history to Eben—that is, he exposes the disguised dark side of human history which is forged, fabricated, and thus fictitious. When he teaches history to Eben and Anna, therefore, Burlingame directs their play-acting to historical events. (*SWF*, p. 8) Also, Burlingame assumes almost everyone's identity, showing Eben that history is, in fact, totally fictitious.<sup>15)</sup> Even Burlingame's arch-enemy, Captain Coode, turns out to be Burlingame himself at the end of the novel. Moreover, the supposedly wicked pirate Captain Coode turns out to be a good guy who has been helping Lord Baltimore to protect Maryland. *The Sot-Weed Factor*, then, suggests that there is indeed no distinction between good and evil (echoing Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*) in the whirlpool of history that is nothing but a plot or a conspiracy of the privileged.

Ebenezer is originally a naive, innocent virgin and poet who is dazzled with the infinite possibilities of the future. Eben leaves England for America to inherit his father's land, Malden, as the Gentleman, Poet and Laureat of the Province of Maryland. At first, "the sum of history is nothing more than the stuff of metaphors in his head" for Eben. Gradually, however, Eben realizes the true identity of history as well as his own naivité about it. He comes to know that innocence is a curse. (*SWF*, pp. 57, 434) Burlingame, too, keeps telling Eben that innocence is ignorance (*SWF*, p. 474) and even crime (p. 801). It was this kind of innocence, suggests Barth throughout the novel, that cost Adam the Garden of Eden and also made man constantly lose paradise. Here, *The Sot-Weed Factor* is strongly paralleled to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. For example, Burlingame says, sharply criticizing Eben's innocence:

I mean 'tis Adam's story thou'rt reenacting.... Ye set great store upon your innocence and by reason oft have lost your earthly paradise. (*SWF*, p. 434)

Later, Eben admits that Burlingame's analogy is right, saying:

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"... but to see our early history made up of selfish motives and unheroic behavior.... (This tendency is already present in the English setting when the novel begins, as we find Sir Issac Newton and Sir Henry More as queers...." (p. 597)

See Alan Holder, "What Marvelous Plot...Was Afoot?": History in Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*," *American Quarterly*, 20 : 3 (Fall 1968).

15) Burlingame assumes the identities of Peter Sayer, Lord Baltimore, Timothy Mitchell, Nicholas Lowe, John Coode, Bertrand Burton, Monsieur Casteene, and even Ebenezer Cooke.

... the crime of innocence, whereof the Knowledge must bear the burden. There's the true Original Sin our souls are born in: not that he had to learn—in short, that he was innocent. (SWF, p. 801)

As Jacob Horner does in *The End of the Road*, therefore, Eben, too, needs Knowledge and Imagination in order to restore the lost paradise. That is, Knowledge about the latent crime of history or what we are forced to believe as the Absolute or Reason or Truth; Imagination for creating a new value system to replace the old. "Sweet land!... Pregnant with songs! Thy deliverer approacheth!" (SWF, p. 104) Thus exclaims Eben, just before his voyage to America. Soon, however, he discovers that the "sweet land" is, in fact, nothing but a paradise of pox and opium (SWF, p. 486), because of the conspiracy of history and politics that he naively admired and trusted as the Absolute.

Eben also learns about his ancestor's crime which was committed in the name of politics, colonialism, and racial superiority which is justified by history. Through Drakepecher, a Negro leader, and Quassapelagh, an Indian chief, Eben is now able to perceive the dark side of history, the legitimacy of which he has never questioned before. Quassapelagh reveals the unwritten part of history to Eben, saying:

Your people have stolen it away. They came in ships with sword and cannon, and took the fields and forests from my father. (SWF, p. 312)

In *The Sot-Weed Factor*, indeed, there is *A Secret Historie* by Captain Smith and other private journals and histories, suggesting all the historical events are, in fact, the products of plots and counter-plots. Eben trembles upon realizing this terrible reality:

Ne'er have I encountered such a string of plots, cabals, murthers, and machinations in life or lit as this history ... it sets my head atwill, and chills my blood!

To Eben who now realizes that "more history's made by secret handshakes than by all the parliaments in the world," (SWF, p. 555) history is but a bad dream. "'Tis but a dream, and now I'll wake! 'Tis but a dream, and now I'll wake," cries Bertrand to Eben. Thus Eben comes to thoroughly distrust history which is supposedly the most honest record of human progress and civilization. Eben wonders: "How do we know who's right and who's wrong...?" (SWF, p. 555)

Finally, Eben gains Knowledge through a number of disillusioning experiences that shatter his naive romantic dream. At the end of the novel, however, Eben, too much

disillusioned with the terrible reality thanks to his newly-acquired knowledge, seems not to enthusiastically pursue new imagination. For example, Eben is too disenchanted with his restored paradise, Maryland, to compose the epic, *Marylandiad*, as originally scheduled. He only composes *The Sot-Weed Factor*, "a Hudibrastic exp6se of the ills that had befallen him," an attack on Maryland or a satiric poem.

And yet, the meaning of Eben's journey to America is very important in understanding the novel. For Eben, America means both his past (birthplace, origin) and his future (poet, beginning). In other words, Eben's voyage to Maryland represents the young poet's journey to his past as well as to his future—a quest for a new paradise by synchronizing the past with the future, and the origin with the beginning.

If *The Sot-Weed Factor* is an epic novel portraying an innocent young poet's initiation, *Giles Goat-Boy* is an account of a goat-man's heroic journey in search of new order and imagination. Billy Bocksfuss, who is raised in Max Spielman's goat-barn, one day realizes that he is a human being. Then he changes his name to George Giles and journeys to the West Campus (the West) to become the grand tutor by changing the AIM (Automatic Implementation Mechanism) of WESCAC, the formidable computer that controls the Western world.

As Marcus Klein points out, "A hero is to be distinguished and certified against universal mythology, religion, history, psychology—against, indeed, the universe."<sup>16</sup> By this definition, George Giles is certainly a mythic hero, since he journeys to the West Campus to challenge the gigantic computer, WESCAC, the absolute power controlling the campus. In the Cover-Letter of the novel, there is an important passage which convincingly supports the above assumption:

My hero... a man enchanted with history, geography, nature, the people around him— everything that is the case—because *he saw its arbitrariness but couldn't understand or accept its finality...* he wasn't finally a spectator at all; *he couldn't stay "out of it,"* and the fiascos of *his involvements* with men and women...<sup>17</sup> (Italics mine) (GG, p. xxvii)

George's realization of his human identity, his determination to challenge the arbitrariness of the dominant culture, and finally his intention to become the Grand Tutor is a perfect example of what I have been calling "human beginning" in the present text.

Just as *The Sot-Weed Factor* does, *Giles Goat-Boy* also burlesques history, myth, politics,

16) See Marcus Klein, "Gods and Goats," *The Reporter*, 35 : 4 (September 22, 1966), p. 60.

17) John Barth, *Giles Goat-Boy* (New York: Fawcett, 1966), p. xxvii.

and ideologies. Almost all of the world leaders in *Giles Goat-Boy* are either myopic or one-eyed: Dr. Eierkopf wears glasses (p. 372); Hector, ex-Chancellor of the West Campus, wears thick glasses (p. 570); Peter Greene, who presumably represents America, is one-eyed (a singleness of vision) and so is Leonia Alexandrov who represents the Soviet Union. What is important here is that George Giles, as an outsider, challenges the hierarchy of the dominant culture, changes the old system whose vision is not only blurred but also distorted, and finally becomes the Grand Tutor himself with the aid of the telescopic and microscopic lenses given to him by Dr. Eierkopf.

It is also very symbolic that the powerful computer, WESCAC, the AIM of which George attempts to change, is in fact George's father. Revolting against the father—a pattern that mythic heroes should follow in order to become a demi-god—is obviously a symbolic act of revolting against the patriarchal system and order. Perhaps one of the most effective ways to fight the oppressive patriarchal system is to understand eternal femininity. Not knowing this, George fails the test at first. Soon, however, he realizes the importance of the Ladyship. Through the ultimate reconciliation with his twin sister, Anastasia, on the belly of WESCAC, therefore, George finally becomes able to “see through” everything and thus passes the test, just as Dante and Goethe do through Beatrice and Gretchen.

It is perhaps in this context that Ambrose's relationship with his mad father and his sexual initiation in *Lost in the Funhouse* should be understood. *Lost in the Funhouse* painfully depicts the agony of a bewildered young artist from his birth to his adulthood who desperately wants to escape the labyrinth created by himself by denouncing the absolute value or the mad father. This desperate attempt of contemporary writers to get out of the funhouse is what Barth calls “heroic enterprise.” Surrounded by numerous reflections of his own bewildered image, and with his intense intention to escape the present reality, the writer meditates, acts, and experiments *ad infinitum* to find the clue of Theseus or what I call “imagination” to get out of the maze.

*Lost in the Funhouse* begins with “Night-Sea Journey,” a superb, brilliant story of the desperate voyage of a spermatozoon from its father to a still-mysterious destination. It is an image of the writer who just left his patriarchal order, starting his own “beginning” as a sperm in the sea of uncertainty. Desperately swimming in order not to be drowned and to reach the seashore, the sperm meditates:

Do I myself exist, or is it a dream? Sometimes I wonder. And if I am, Who am I? The Heritage

I supposedly transport?... My trouble is, I lack conviction. Many accounts of our situation seem plausible to me—where and what, we are, why we swim and whither.<sup>18)</sup>

The sperm believes that there is She, the eternal femininity, who lies not far ahead on the shore and stills the sea and draws him Herward. Thus he forswears himself: "deny myself, plunge into Her who summons, singing... "Love! Love! Love!" (*LF*, p. 12)

In the next story, "Ambrose His Mark," the sperm becomes a baby. When Ambrose is born and brought home, his father is in the Eastern Shore Asylum. As a result, he does not have a name for several months: "Owing to the hectic circumstances of my birth, for some months I had no proper name." (*LF*, p. 13) Moreover, the story soon reveals that his father, Hector, went crazy when Ambrose was born, for he thought he was not the father of the baby. Hence, the father's denouncement of his own son, the "little orphan of the storm."

In "Autobiography," therefore, Ambrose announces his independence and writes his life-story, declaring, "I must compose myself." (*LF*, p. 33) Then in the following story, "Water-Message," Ambrose receives the blank water-message which he should fill in by himself using his own language and imagination. Out of desperation, Ambrose petitions in "Petition" and eventually is "Lost in the Funhouse." Bewildered as he is, Ambrose desperately tries to get out of the funhouse. Ambrose's intention, involvement, or beginning as a young artist is well manifested in the title story:

He wishes he had never entered the funhouse. But he has. Then he wishes he were dead. But he's not. Therefore he will construct funhouses for others and be their secret operator—though he would rather be among the lovers for whom funhouses are designed. (*LF*, p. 94)

Meditating on the role of the writer and the role of the reader in "Echo," "Two Meditations," "Title," "Life-Story," and the important "Menelaiad," Ambrose in the final story, "Anonymiad," sends out the stories he composed in jugs in the sea. In *Lost in the Funhouse*, Barth persistently suggests that the writer's will, intention, or attempt to get out of the funhouse is more important and valuable than the actual escaping itself. The same analogy applies to the night-sea journey:

The night-sea journey may be absurd, but here we swim, will-we nill-we, against the flood, onward and upward, toward a *Shore that may not exist* and couldn't be reached if it did. (*LF*, p. 5) (Italics mine)

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18) John Barth, *Lost in the Funhouse* (New York: Bantam, 1978), p. 3.

*Chimera*, too, deals with the dilemma and frustrations of four mythic heroes: Dunyazade, Sheherazade, Perseus, and Bellerophon. Sheherazade's problem is that she has to invent stories every night to amuse the tyrannical king, Shahryar, in order not to be executed. In other words, her storytelling is the only strategy for deferring and eventually defeating her death. Barth shrewdly and acutely perceives that this is precisely the present predicament of contemporary writers. Failure in creating new imagination means death by the hand of the absolute power. New imagination, then, is the only way of protection from death—physically for Sheherazade and spiritually for contemporary writers. Foucault makes a very interesting argument about this motif:

*The Arabian Nights* in particular, had as their motivation, their theme and pretext, this strategy for defeating death. Storytellers continued their narratives late into the night to forestall death and to delay the inevitable moment when everyone must fall silent. Sheherazade's story is a desperate inversion of murder; it is the effort, throughout all those nights, to exclude death from the circle of existence. This conception of a spoken or written narrative as a protection against death has been transformed by our culture.<sup>19)</sup>

As Foucault observes, Sheherazade's death is indefinitely "deferred" until she exhausts all the possibilities of inventing stories. Sheherazade finally marries the King who gives up his tyranny thanks to her infinite imagination. The long period of deferment is thus finally over for the storyteller by uniting with the absolute power. One important thing that cannot be neglected here is that this archetypal story ultimately suggests the reconciliation of the writer with the dominant culture as a happy ending. And so does Barth. (I will discuss this matter later.)

Dunyazade's dilemma illustrates yet another problem that contemporary writers face: "the difficulty of finding new imagination." Dunyazade, who is to marry the King's brother Shah Zaman who already knows all the stories invented by Sheherazade, laments her dilemma:

What are you going to do to entertain *him*, little sister? Make love in exciting new ways? There are none! Tell him stories, like Sheherazade? He's heard them all! Dunyazade, Dunyazade! Who can tell your story? (*CH*, p. 41)<sup>20)</sup>

As early as in the 1940's, José Ortega Y Gasset predicted this dilemma of the writer:

19) Michel Foucault, "What Is An Author?" *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), p. 117.

20) John Barth, *Chimera* (New York: Fawcett, 1972), p. 41.



The workmen of the primal hour had no trouble finding new blocks—new characters, new themes. But present-day writers face the fact that only narrow and concealed veins are left them.... This, I believe, is now happening to the novel. It has become practically impossible to find new subjects. Here we come upon the first cause of our enormous difficulty, an objective not a personal difficulty, of writing an acceptable novel at this advanced stage.... Not only is the difficulty of finding new subjects steadily growing, but ever “newer” and more extraordinary ones are needed to impress the reader.... In short, I believe that the genre of the novel, if it is not yet irretrievably exhausted, has certainly entered its last phase.<sup>21)</sup>

As Sheherazade and Duniyazade do, Perseus and Bellerophon, too, face death. Perseus becomes convinced that he is petrifying and wonders if it might not be the late effects of radiant from Medusa (*CH*, p. 79). Bellerophon becomes aware that he and his Pegasus feel fat, fatigued and thus cannot fly any more. Both Perseus and Bellerophon are presented as forty-year-old men, suggesting the dilemma of the middle-aged imagination. The mirror-shield that Perseus borrowed from Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom and Knowledge, to use in slaying Medusa in his prime time is no longer available. He once created the beautiful Pegasus out of the ugly Medusa’s dead body by wisely avoiding direct confrontation with the ugliness. Yet, now he feels he is petrifying. Bellerophon, too, was a mythic hero who, riding Pegasus, killed Chimera with a lead-headed spear by “thrusting between the monster’s jaws a lump of lead which he had fixed to the point of his spear.”<sup>22)</sup> The images of the winged-horse Pegasus and the lead-headed spear which were vital for destroying the fiery monster Chimera perfectly suits my thesis in the present text; Pegasus represents the writer’s Imagination, the lead-headed spear his Pencil, and Chimera the monstrous Absolute. The same interpretation applies to Perseus’s shield (Wisdom) and Medusa (the Absolute). Both monsters have the power to destroy the heroes (writers), unless they are equipped with imagination, wisdom, and of course the pencil.

Now the prime time is over for both Perseus and Bellerophon. Suddenly they feel that they have never achieved the heroic task—slaying the monsters—because what they have followed is the phony Pattern and thus their lives are fictitious. (*CH*, p. 293) Bellerophon says:

21) José Ortega Y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 58~60.

22) See Robert Graves, *The Greek Myth* (London: Penguin, 1980), p. 253.

“Be that as it may, Bellerophon overcame the Chimera by flying above her on Pegasus’s back, riddling her with arrows, and then thrusting between her jaw a lump of lead which he had fixed to the point of his spear. The Chimera’s fiery breath melted the lead which tickled down her throat, searing her vitals.”

Whatever blinders I still steered with thereupon fell from me, and I saw the chimera of my life. By imitating perfectly the Pattern of Mythic Heroism, I'd become, not a mythic hero, but a perfect Reset. I was no Perseus, my tale no Perseid—even had we been, I and it, so what? Not mortal me, but immortality, was the myth. (*CH*, p. 315)

Both Perseus and Bellerophon ultimately distrust the authentic versions of their myths as a phony Pattern imposed by the Absolute. Tony Tanner aptly points out that while older countries are ridden by conventions, rules, and other arbitrary formalities, America constantly pursues a dream of an unpatterned life:

...there is an abiding dream in American literature that an unpatterned, unconditioned life is possible, in which your movements and stillness, choices and repudiations are all your own; and that there is also an abiding American dread that someone else is patterning your life, that there are all sorts of invisible plots afoot to rob you of your autonomy of thought and action, that conditioning is ubiquitous. The problematical and ambiguous relationship of the self to patterns of all kinds—social, psychological, linguistic—is an obsession among recent American writers.<sup>23)</sup>

Perseus refuses this pattern and returns to the past to reexamine what was wrong in his past life. Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom, again helps Perseus in his search for rejuvenation. He has to rediscover and reconfront the Medusa he killed, who now has the power either to petrify or to rejuvenate and immortalize Perseus. If Perseus has enough courage and love to face her, he will be rejuvenated and immortalized, but if he is a doubtful false lover, he will be petrified. Afraid to risk his life, Perseus at first avoids unveiling Medusa, the reality and the truth, and thus becomes blind. Finally, however, Perseus unveils and faces Medusa who has been transformed into a beautiful woman. At the very moment, Perseus becomes constellation, rejuvenated and immortalized forever. Thus Perseus finally succeeds in becoming a mythic hero who is capable of changing the Pattern. This reverse journey of Perseus for rejuvenation and immortality is what Foucault calls "counter-memory."

Unlike Perseus, Bellerophon is a failed mythic hero. Instead of changing it, he only imitates the Pattern. Further, he is an imitation of Perseus and even an imitation of Bellerophon himself; it is later revealed that he is actually Bellerophon's dead brother, Deliades. As Patricia Warrick argues, the failure of Bellerophon derives from his attempt to create a myth according to the Pattern:

23) Tony Tanner, *City of Words: American Fiction, 1950~1970* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 15.

The very failure of Bellerophon to become an immortal mythic hero results from his consciousness of the pattern for a mythic hero. Perseus became aware, after the fact, that he was a mythic hero; Bellerophon sets out intending to become one and fails. Because he has the Pattern in advance and attempts to create a myth that follows the pattern, he cannot. *The myth-making process is part of the unconscious activity of the imagination.* It must work in the dark. *The journey is inward,* below the level of awareness, into the subconscious. Chimera is shrouded in smoke—never clearly visible—and she lives in a cave.<sup>24)</sup> (Italics mine)

Perhaps one of the ground themes of *LETTERS* is the second revolution both in life and in literature, since the first one has failed. On a number of occasions, for instance, Barth explicitly suggests the second American Revolution in *LETTERS* because history is so corrupted, forged, and fictitious. The prophecy of the revolution against the established order and the intention to create a new one constitute the dominant theme of this thick, ambitious book. The unique epistolary form that Barth adopted for this novel is a good example of this. Barth's genealogical research into the origin of the novel allows him to reuse the first form ever used in the novel—the epistolary form—for his seventh novel. And yet, Barth's intention is by no means to simply imitate the old form or pattern. Rather, it is his own creation with the aid of the imagination and inspiration he acquired from the original form. In *Chimera*, for example, the twentieth century storyteller, Barth, and the archetypal storyteller, Sheherazade, help each other by sharing imagination, inspiration, and wisdom. In other words, it is Barth's cyclic historicism that allows the communication between the present and the past. It is astonishing to realize how strongly Barth's cyclic historicism evokes Vico's notion of the "ideal eternal history."<sup>25)</sup>

Perhaps the most outstanding words we encounter in *LETTERS* are "cyclic," "reenactment," "repetition," "redeem," "recycle," and "pattern." All of these words suggest that *LETTERS* is a novel which persistently seeks a redemptive mode of now fiction and new life transcending the boundaries between the present and the past. Once again, history is presented in *LETTERS* as a mixture of plots and counter-plots, forgery and fiction. Todd Andrews in *LETTERS* laments: "History is a catenation of disasters, redeemable only (and imperfectly) by the Tragic View." (*LE*, P. 94, also see PP. 720, 721, 735);<sup>26)</sup> "I wept for history." (*LE*, P. 96) If Todd's Tragic View of History manifests his fundamental

24) See Patricia Warrick, "The Circuitious Journey of Consciousness in Barth's *Chimera*," *Critique*, xviii: 2 (1976), p. 82.

25) For Vico's cyclic historicism, see Vico's *New Science*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

26) John Barth, *LETTERS* (New York: Putnam, 1979), pp. 94, 720, 721, 735.

distrust of conventional history, Jacob Horner's Anniversary View of History symbolizes his cyclic historicism as a redemptive mode. Joe Morgan orders Jacob Horner to rewrite and redream history and thus change the past. (*LE*, PP. 18~20, 581, 739) This strongly evokes Perseus' redreaming of his past as a way of rejuvenation in *Chimera*. By reenacting his past, Jacob is also remobilized, saying, "I am back at the beginning of mine." Then suddenly Joe and the Negro doctor die. For Jacob, now the "end of the road is the commencement of another," (*LE*, 278~279) and thus finally Jacob is able to say clearly, "I am Jacob Horner."

Jerome Bray, the mysterious prophet in *Giles Goat-Boy*, is obsessed with how to reset the *Revised New Syllabus* in *LETTERS*. Every character in *LETTERS* is indeed pre-occupied with how to rewrite, redream, reenact, reset, revive, redeem, recycle, repeat, replenish, resuscitate, remobilize and repattern the past, because "history lies in the future." (*LE*, p. 409) The motif "pattern" also appears throughout the novel.<sup>27)</sup> The pattern which is imposed by the dominant culture, suggests Barth, can be removed by regressing: "Andrew V exercises his liberation from the pattern by regressing."

While *LETTERS* is the culmination of Barth's first cycle, *Sabbatical* is his literal sabbatical before beginning his second cycle. It is a story of and about a couple, Susan Rachel Allan Seckler and Fenwick Scott Key Turner, who are aboard their cruising sailboat until the novel ends. The story is narrated by the couple who have nearly completed a nine-month voyage from Chesapeake Bay to the Caribbean. Throughout the book, Barth demonstrates an unusual concern with the dominant culture, politics and recent historical events. Barth's keen awareness as well as sharp criticism of American foreign policy in Central America, C.I.A. espionage, racialism, motor cycle gangs and others again repeatedly remind us that history is nothing but a conspiracy of a mixture of plots and counterplots which patterns and operates man. Fenwick says:

I leaned over the bridge, awed as much by the violent history as by the secrecy, and tried to remind myself that the voltage between two people, the pressure-cooker of a single human heart, is as fit stuff literature as are the epic convulsions of history and geography.<sup>28)</sup>

His wife Susan, too, realizing her naïveté and powerlessness about the violent history that governs man, cries:

27) The motif of "pattern" appears on pages 255, 259, 278, 479, 481, 486, 523, 627, 671, 747 in *LETTERS*.

28) John Barth *Sabbatical: A Romance* (New York: Putnam, 1982), p. 39.

Suddenly she cries I hate my position!.... I sit here on my essentially virtuous tush with my innocent Ph.D., teaching undergraduates the difference between Transcendentalism and Existentialism, correcting their comma fault, pretending that art and moral values and subject-verb agreement matter, while my husband and my stepfather-brother-in-law and their buddies kill Patrice Lumumba and overthrow Mohammed Mossadegh and Salvador Allende and send agents to Cuba by submarine to make Fidel Castro's beard fall out and get our own president killed in reprisal.... (SA, p. 118)

The agony of Fenwick and Susan clearly represents the agony of contemporary writers: the writer's innocence and helplessness about the crime of the dominant culture. Thus Fenwick leaves the C.I.A. for which he worked for ten years, and begins his voyage searching for new imagination to replace the old totalitarian order. The names, Key Turner, Key Island, and Solomon's Island—all of these suggest that his quest is for finding the key, wisdom, and, of course, imagination.

### III

It is out of this state of deferment, this sense of rootlessness, and this sense of loss and denial that the Barthian protagonists set out on a journey into the past in search of new language and imagination. The past belongs to our fathers, with the origin of human history and divine myths, and, of course, with the origin of all the problems and dilemmas we now face. There, at the heart of the past from which all the veins of historical events and human errors derive, the Barthian protagonists discover the ultimate reason for the exhausted possibilities of contemporary literature. What they have found in the past is the perversity and darkness of civilization which fundamentally misguided the course of human history. In other words, they realize that what they have believed as the Absolute is, in fact, merely a distorted imitation of the original Absolute.

Metaphorically speaking, the paradise man tries to restore cannot be and needs not to be exactly the same Garden of Eden that Adam and Eve lost. Imitation, therefore, is the least thing man needs. Creation, on the contrary, is the only way to recover the lost paradise, although it might create a different version of paradise. This notion, therefore, allows a perpetual difference and distance between the divine original and the human creation. This human creation begins when the Barthian protagonists start the second journey, this time, from the past to the present, reinvestigating the perverse history and myths and thereby creating a different version of history and myths. This is precisely what Vico calls secular

history, Nietzsche genealogy, Foucault archaeology, Said beginning, and Barth the journey of rejuvenation.

Creation requires imagination. The Barthian protagonists acquire the necessary imagination through their journey to the past and then eventually to the present—a reverse and thus ultimately circuitous journey of what Foucault calls “counter-memory.” In other words, they acquire new imagination through their clashes and conciliations with their fathers, through their disillusionments with the past, and through their intention to create new history and myths to replace the old.

Barth has never acknowledged the exhaustion of imagination or the death of literature. Rather, all of his novels are a desperate attempt to search for new imagination to replenish old literature. For Barth, new imagination is always hidden in the past, in our lost origin. And his novels are a persistent attempt to bring back the lost imagination and the lost language. Perhaps, however, the lost origin cannot be restored, or perhaps it is not necessary to restore it, since the important thing is our intention, our attempt, and our beginning, and since, therefore, our journey itself is ultimately the new imagination we hope to discover. Thus continues Barth’s rebellion, loneliness, and night-sea journey, constantly subverting the tradition, and yet constantly seeking an accommodation, thereby creating the postmodern mythos—“The key to the treasure is the treasure.”